

## Social Media Marketing

- From 'Bowling' to 'Pinball'

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In the physical marketplace different communication tools are used in the buying process of customers. Traditional mass communication tools (print advertising, TV and radio) can create awareness and this can result in consumers' identification of new needs. From then on other elements of the communication mix take over, such as direct marketing (direct marketing, personal selling) and in-store promotion. Unlike marketing in the physical marketplace the Internet/e-commerce encompasses the entire 'buying' process. Of course, the online markets also make use of traditional mass advertising in order to get potential customers into the online buying process.

Market communication strategies change dramatically in the online world. On the Internet it is easier than ever to actually *communicate* a message to large numbers of people. However, in many cases it is much harder for your message to be heard above the noise by your target audience. Various strategies for conducting online marketing have been developed in the past several years – from the most common (website linking) to the most expensive (banner advertising) to the most offensive (e-mail spamming), and everything in between. It is almost certain that a continual stream of new market communication strategies will emerge as the Internet medium evolves.

How, then, can a Web audience be created? One of the new possibilities in this field is social media marketing.

When you sell and buy you will experience that it is part of a social process. It involves not only a one-to-one interaction between the company and the customer but also many exchanges of information and influence among the people who surround the customer. Consumers are much more trusting in friends and colleagues than they are in TV advertising or corporate communication. *Word-of-Mouth (WoM)* has shown many more times more effective than traditional print advertising in impacting brand switching decisions.

Word-of-mouth and conversations can take place off-line and on-line. Like any conversation, in a café, the content varies. Some conversations are serious and some fun, some are short and some long, some happy and some angry and intense. In on-line conversations consumers' experiences with brands and services are often openly discussed, whether companies are involved or not. In this way, consumers are becoming more powerful. Clearly monitoring the on-line conversations and intervening, when appropriate, has advantages to brand managers in any B2B or B2C company. Such monitoring can lead to a better understanding of consumer behavior and feelings of the market mood. It can lead to changes in the different parts of the marketing mix.

## **WEB 2.0**

Web 2.0 websites allow you to do more than just retrieve information, as this was mainly the case with Web 1.0. Web 2.0 transforms broadcast media monologues (one-to-many = Web 1.0) into social media dialogues (many-to-many). The term Web 2.0 was first used in 2004 to describe a new way software developers and end-users started to utilize the internet to create content and applications that were no longer created and published by individuals, but instead continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. The popularity of the term Web 2.0, along with the increasing use of blogs, wikis, and social networking technologies, has led many in academia and business to work with these 'new' phenomena. For marketers, Web 2.0 offers an opportunity to engage consumers. A growing number of marketers are using Web 2.0 tools to collaborate with consumers on product development, service enhancement and promotion. Companies can use Web 2.0 tools to improve collaboration with both its business partners and consumers. Among other things, company employees have created wikis, which are Web sites that allow users to add, delete and edit content, and to list answers to frequently asked questions about each product, and consumers have added significant contributions. Another Web 2.0 marketing feature is to make sure consumers can use the online community to network among themselves on content that they choose themselves. Besides generating content, the Web 2.0 Internet user tends to proactively bring in a whole new perspective on established processes and approaches, so that the users create innovative ideas for the future development of companies.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media are Internet-based technologies that facilitate online conversations and encompass a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including social networking websites, blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, and sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs, to name a few. Lately, the official company and brand web sites have typically been

losing audience. This decline is believed to be due to the emergence of social media marketing by the brands themselves, an increasingly pervasive marketing practice.

According to ebizmba.com the world's largest social networking site is Facebook, which was initially founded by Mark Zuckerberg in order to stay in touch with his fellow students from Harvard University. In May 2014 the five most popular social websites (exclusive YouTube and Google) were (number of unique visitors worldwide per month):

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Facebook  | 900 million |
| 2. Twitter   | 310 million |
| 3. LinkedIn  | 255 million |
| 4. Pinterest | 250 million |
| 5. Google+   | 120 million |

([www.ebizmba.com](http://www.ebizmba.com))

For social media usage and development, the diversity of languages is creating communication challenges on a global basis. Facebook has 800 million weekly users, with more than 70% outside the United States. To effectively communicate with non-English users, Facebook has 70 translations available on its site made possible by a vast network of 300,000 volunteers and translators. Facebook and Twitter are mostly interactive social media on an intimate level. As such, these platforms offer direct selling companies means of communicating with key stakeholders (customers and distributors) in the industry. On the other hand, YouTube, with its more traditional one-way audience communication, appears to be used more effectively for recruiting consumers to become distributors of information or products.

One of the 'shooting stars' during the last years is LinkedIn, which is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. Launched in 2003, it is mainly used for professional networking. While Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter continue to dominate social media in the US and Europe some other countries, the global scene tells a different story. In Germany, Russia, China and Japan, the most visited social networking site is not Facebook but home-grown rivals.

Integrated marketing communications (IMC) have traditionally been considered to be largely one-way in nature ("Bowling" – see below Figure 1). In the old paradigm, the organization and its agents developed the message and transmitted it to potential consumers, who may or may not have been willing

participants in the communication process. The control over the dissemination of information was in the hands of the firm's marketing organization. The traditional elements of the promotion mix (advertising, personal selling, public relations and publicity, direct marketing and sales promotion) were the tools through which control was asserted.

The twenty-first century is witnessing an explosion of Internet-based messages transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Unfortunately, the popular business press and academic literature offers marketing managers very little guidance for incorporating social media into their IMC strategies.

Social networking as communication tools has two interrelated promotional roles:

1. Social networking should be consistent with the use of traditional IMC tools. That is, companies should use social media to talk to their customers through such platforms as blogs, as well as Facebook and Twitter groups. These media may either be company-sponsored or sponsored by other individuals or organizations.
2. Social networking is enabling customers to talk to one another. This is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication. While companies cannot directly control such consumer-to-consumer (C2C) messages, they do have the ability to influence the conversations that consumers have with one another. However, consumers' ability to communicate with one another limits the amount of control companies have over the content and dissemination of information. Consumers are in control; they have greater access to information and greater command over media consumption than ever before.

Marketing managers are seeking ways to incorporate social media into their IMC strategies. The traditional communications paradigm, which relied on the classic promotional mix to craft IMC strategies, must give way to a new paradigm that includes all forms of social media as potential tools in designing and implementing IMC strategies. Contemporary marketers cannot ignore the phenomenon of social media, where available market information is based on the experiences of individual consumers and is channeled through the traditional promotion mix. However, various social media platforms, many of which are completely independent of the producing/sponsoring organization or its agents, enhance consumers' ability to communicate with one another.

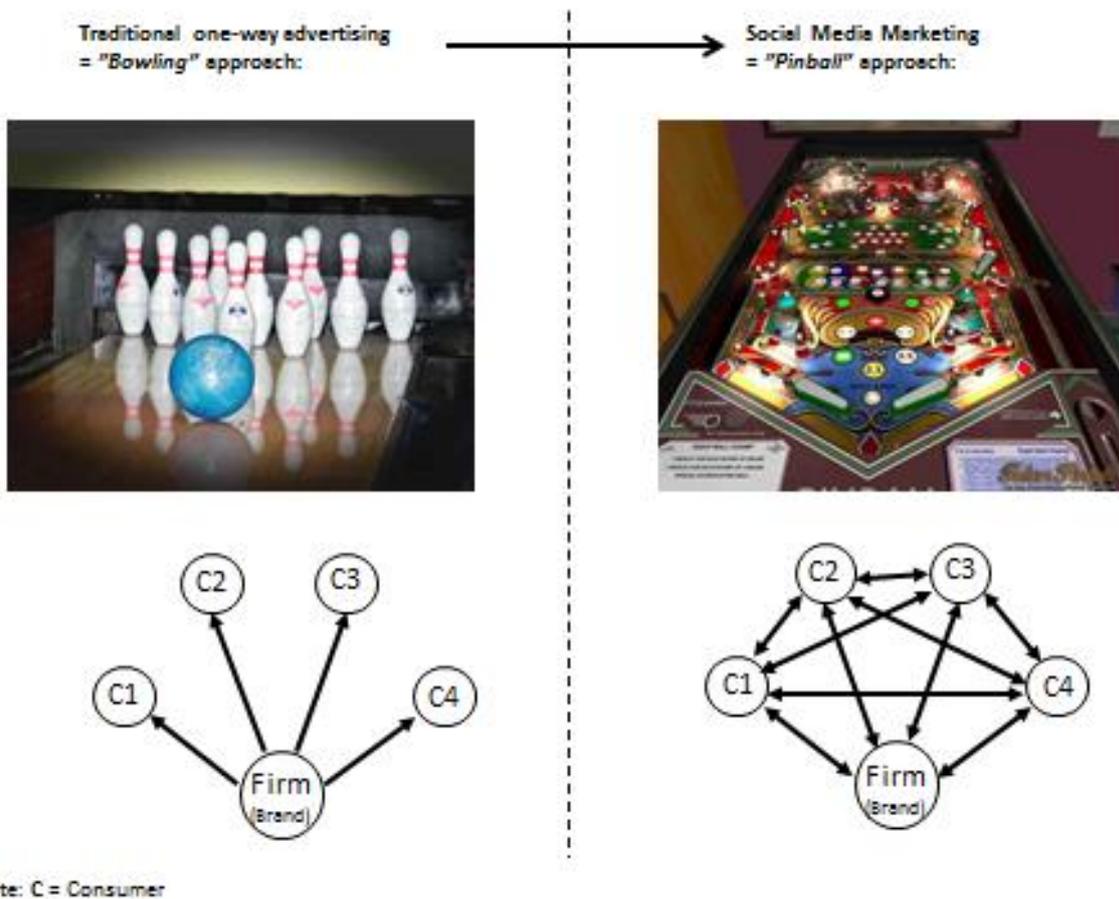
## From “Bowling” to “Pinball”

Although a little oversimplified, marketing in the pre-social media era was comparable to “**Bowling**” (see Figure 1).

A game of bowling shows how you may have traditionally communicated with your consumers, with the firm and the brand (the bowler) rolling a ball (the brand communication message) towards the pins (our target customers). Clearly this is a very direct one-way communication approach. This is the old traditional push model. Marketers targeted certain customer groups and sent out their advertising messages like bowling balls. They used traditional media to hit as many bowling pins as possible. One key characteristic of this bowling marketing game was the large amount of control the company retained over marketing communication because consumers were given only limited freedom of action.

For many bigger companies a large TV-budget has been the ball that marketers rolled down the lane, trying to hit as many the pins as possible. Marketers were in control, happily counting how many "pins" they had hit, and how often. Success in this game was clear-cut, and the metrics clear.

Figure 1: The Bowling to Pinball model: Transition of market communication from “Bowling” to “Pinball”



Source: Based on Hollensen (2015), p. 534

## **The times are changing**

In a social media marketing world, the bowling metaphor does not fit anymore. On this arena marketing can be better described as playing **“Pinball”**: Companies serve up a “marketing ball” (brands and brand-building messages) into a dynamic and chaotic market environment. The “marketing ball” is then diverted and often accelerated by social media “bumpers”, which change the ball’s course in chaotic ways. After the marketing ball is in play, marketing managers may continue to guide it with agile use of the “flippers” but the ball does not always go where it is intended to.

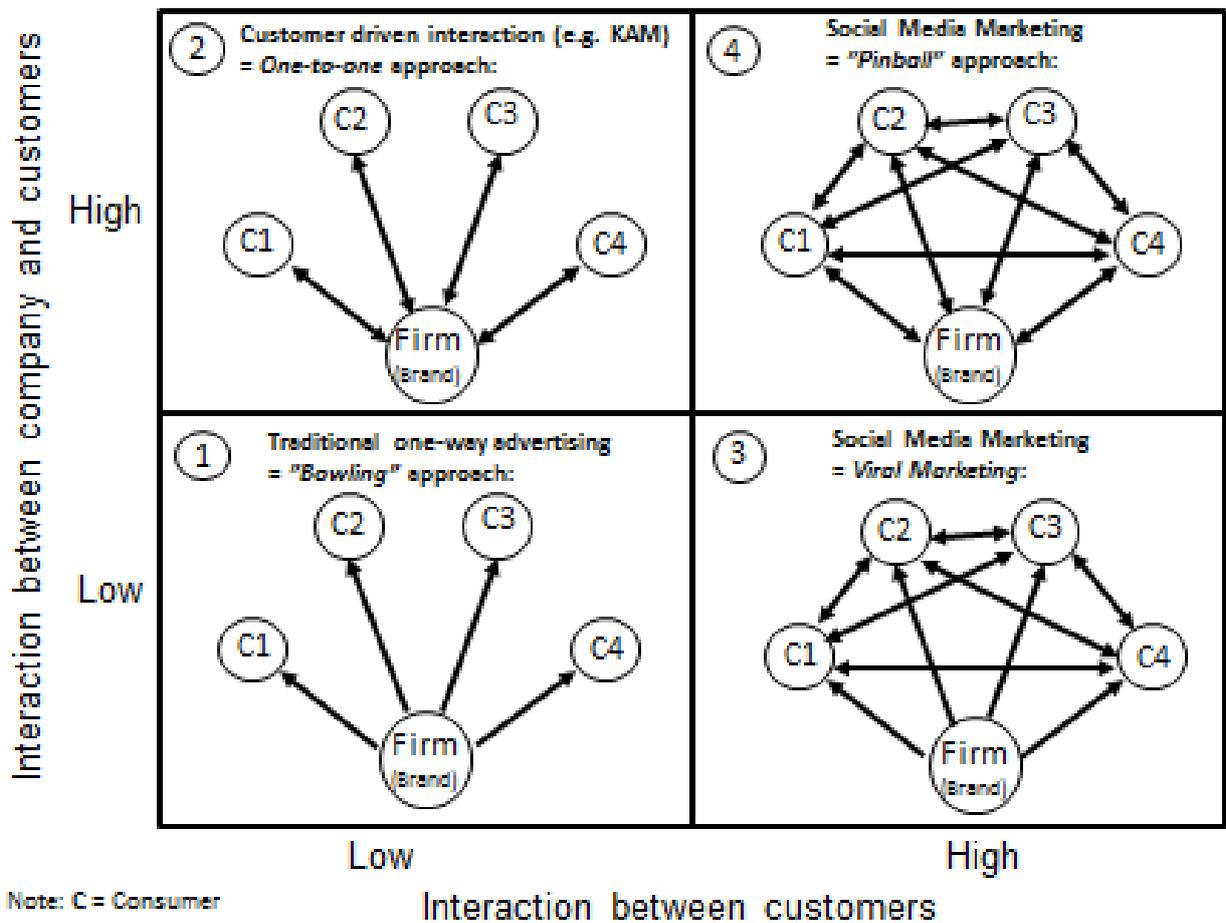
Consequently, in the “pinball” world, you cannot know outcomes in advance. Instead, marketers have to be prepared to respond in real time to the spin put on the ball by consumers. When mastered well, the pinball game can deliver big point multipliers, and if the company is very good, even more balls can be shot into the game. A reason for this may be that today consumers have a large audience to bring up new topics on the communication agenda. In the ideal situation, you are reaching networked influencers, advocates, and other high-value consumers, who may sustain and spread positive conversations about the brand across multiple channels.

Occasionally, the marketing ball will come back to the company. At this point, the firm (brand) has to use the flippers to interact and throw it back into the social media sphere. If the company or the brand does not feed the social marketing media sphere by flipping communications back, the ball will finally drop through the flippers and on longer term, the two way relationship between consumers and the firm (brand) will die.

## **The extended model of interactive market communication**

In the Figure 2 (below) the ‘Bowling to Pinball’ model is further elaborated into an extended model of interactive market communication:

Figure 2: The extended interactive market communication model



Source: Based on Hollensen (2015), p. 535

The four different communication styles, represented in Figure 2, are:

**The Traditional one-way advertising** (mass media advertising like television advertising, newspaper / magazine advertising etc.) represents the “Bowling” approach where the firm attempts to “hit” as many customers with “shotgun” mass media methods. Normally this approach is a one-way communication type.

**Customer-driven interaction** represents a higher degree of interaction between the company and its different key customers. Often the company finds some Key Account managers, who have the responsibility of taking care of the one-to-one interaction between the firm and its key accounts (customers).

**Viral Marketing** is representing the version 1.0 of Social Media Marketing, where the company e.g. uses an untraditional YouTube video to get attention and awareness about its brand. The interaction between the potential ‘customers’ is quite high (blogging sites etc.), but the feed-back to the company is relatively low (no double arrows back to the company).

**Social Media Marketing** is representing the version 2.0 of Social Media Marketing, where there is also an extensive feed-back to the company itself (double arrows back to the company). Here the company proactively has chosen to be a co-player in the discussion and blogging on the different relevant social media sites (Facebook, Twitter etc.). This also means that the company here tries to strengthen the interaction with the customers in a positive direction, in order to influence the customer behavior. In order to do so, the company needs a back-up team of social media employees who can interact and communicate on-line with potential and actual customers. Consequently, this strategy is also very resource demanding.

## Summary

A very important communication tool for the future is the Internet and the social media. Any company eager to take advantage of the Internet on a global scale must select a business model for its Internet ventures and estimate how information and transactions delivered through this direct marketing medium will influence its existing distribution and communication system.

Social media marketing can be understood as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the foundations of Web 2.0 and that then allows the creation and exchange of ‘User Generated Content’.

In the ‘**Bowling**’ marketing world, marketers target certain customer groups and send out their advertising messages like bowling balls. They use traditional media to hit as many bowling pins as possible. One key characteristic of this bowling marketing game is the large amount of control the company retains over marketing communication because consumers are given only limited freedom of action. Clearly this is a very direct one-way communication approach.

In a social media marketing world, the bowling metaphor does not fit anymore. On this arena marketing can be better described as playing “**Pinball**”: Companies serve up a “marketing ball” (brands and brand-building messages) into a dynamic and chaotic market environment. The “marketing ball” is then diverted and often accelerated by social media “bumpers”, which change the ball’s course in chaotic ways. Occasionally, the marketing ball will come back to the company. At this point, the firm (brand) has to use the flippers to interact and throw it back into the social media sphere. Consequently, in the “pinball” world, you cannot

know outcomes in advance. Instead, marketers have to be prepared to respond in real time to the spin put on the ball by consumers.

**References:**

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